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ABSTRACT

The amount of interest camp counselors have in nature study and the degree to which counselors might be responsible for the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the campers were studied. Each counselor from 11 junior 4-H camps held at Camp Ohio during 1970 completed a questionnaire during the last 24-hour period of his (her) respective camp. It was found that the attitude and interests of counselors were keys to the success of any 4-H camping program. It was concluded that the most basic needs for an increased interest in nature study by junior campers were greater interest in nature programs by counselors and agent-directors, and training of counselors. (CK)

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An Abstract Of A Field Study

CAMP COUNSELOR INFLUENCE ON THE 4-H JUNIOR CAMP NATURE STUDY PROGRAMS AT CAMP OHIO

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Twelve Central Ohio counties hold their annual 4-H junior camping programs at Camp Ohio, located in Licking County. Nineteen-hundred junior campers, aged 9 to 14, annually participate in the camps. Cooperative Extension agents responsible for planning and conducting the 4-H junior camping program at the camp are becoming increasingly concerned about the lack of interest and enthusiasm for the nature study program shown by many of the campers.

This study attempted to determine the amount of interest camp counselors have in nature study and the degree to which counselors might be responsible for the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the campers. In addition, recommendations were developed to propose the changes needed to remedy the situation by developing better methods of selecting counselors to be involved in the nature study program as well as improved training procedures.

Reasons for the Study

Evaluation by campers shows that counselor aged campers have a low regard for nature type activities. The author has observed that junior campers tend to place nature study according to the emphasis given it at their particular camp. Attendance levels at nature study sessions, particularly optional sessions, tend to bare out the evaluation. These two observations seem to be related, since studies of 4-H camp counselors have shown that the counselor is the key person at camp with regard to stimulating interest and enthusiasm among campers for any or all activities. Since people of counselor age have a low regard for nature study, and since, as other studies show, counselors feel they are less well prepared for leadership of the nature study program than any other camping responsibility, this might help to account for the junior campers' lack of interest in the nature studies.

The Study

Each counselor from the 11 junior camps held at Camp Ohio during 1970 completed a questionnaire during the last 24 hour period of his (her) respective camp. The questions dealt with a number of variables which were hypothesized as being related to a counselor's performance in nature study. Further, the two Camp Ohio naturalists recorded the attendance and other data about each session of nature study at each camp. At the conclusion of the camping season, the naturalists evaluated each camp in paired comparison with all other camps with respect to a number of variables in the quality of nature study at the camp.

Many variations were found among the different camping programs, such as:

1. Length of camp.
2. Number of counselors used at camp.
3. Number of counselors involved in the nature program.
4. Number of nature study programs offered.
5. Total attendance at nature study programs.
6. Interest of counselors in nature study.
7. Agent time spent in the nature study program.
8. Degree of counselor training.
9. Degree to which the training was utilized in the nature study programs.

Findings

Previous studies of 4-H camping programs revealed that the attitude and interests of counselors were keys to the success of any 4-H camping program. This was substantiated in this study. Each counselor indicated his interest in the nature study program by means of an interest scale on the questionnaire, numbered 1 (low interest) to 5 (high interest).

From these responses, an average interest level was arrived at for each county. In comparing this with the rankings which the naturalists give the county nature programs, it is interesting to note that the five counties with the highest counselor nature interest scores were the same five which the naturalists gave top ratings. These findings reinforce the need to select counselors who by interest and action can promote and encourage campers to participate in the nature study program.

The need for training counselors has always been stressed by the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service. This study underscores the merit of such training, as was noted in comparing the training received by counselors in the top ranked five counties with that received by those in the lower six. For example, 84.4 per cent of the counselors in the top five counties attended counselors' camp, whereas only 56.6 per cent of those in the lower six did. The same trend is reflected in the training given at the county and area level. Taking total training into consideration, it was found that 98 per cent of the counselors in the top five counties received some type of training compared to 77 per cent for the lower six.

The same trend was found with regard to training in nature study as was found in general counselor training. The top five counties gave training in nature studies to 42 per cent of their counselors; the lower six gave training to 27 per cent of theirs. The top five counties trained an average of 8.6 counselors per county for nature programs, while 6.6 counselors per county were trained for nature programs by the lower six.

Another strong relationship was found between the number of counselors to campers involved in the nature programs. There was, on the average,

one counselor to every 10.7 campers participating in the nature program for the top ranked five counties. This ratio was one to 21.7 for the lower six.

As might be expected, the attitude and interest of the agent serving as Camp Director was very important. Four agents among the top five counties were actively involved in the nature program, averaging 3.4 hours in a teaching role per camp. Only two agents from the lower six were involved for an average two hours per camp. Further, the agents from the top five counties considered nature study to be more important to the camping program than did those from the lower six.

Some aspects which might have been expected to be related to interest in nature study, but which were not, included method of selecting counselors, and counselor experience.

From the data, the author concluded that the three most basic needs for increased interest in nature study by junior campers are:

1. Greater interest in nature programs by counselors.
2. Greater interest in nature programs by agent-directors.
3. Training of counselors.

Recommendations

The following are some of the recommendations the author made based upon the data collected in the study:

For increased interest in nature study among junior campers,

1) Extension agents should select counselors who have an above average interest in nature study activities.

2) The camper-counselor ratio in nature study programs should be kept at 12 to one or less.

3) Counselors must receive training.

4) Counselors trained in the nature study area should be used in that program.

5) Camp directors (agents) should show an interest in the nature study program, and, if possible, take an active role in that program.

6) The Camp Ohio Corporation should consider subsidizing the cost of counselors' camp to enable more counselors to participate.

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